



# CITY OF LODI

## COUNCIL COMMUNICATION

**AGENDA TITLE:** Lodi Cycle Bowl 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

**MEETING DATE:** April 2, 2003

**PREPARED BY:** City Clerk

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**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** That Mayor Hitchcock present a proclamation celebrating Lodi Cycle Bowl's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** The Mayor has been requested to present a proclamation in celebration of Lodi Cycle Bowl's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Ralph Lee with the Lodi Motorcycle Club will be at the meeting to accept the proclamation.

**FUNDING:** None required.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Susan J. Blackston".

Susan J. Blackston  
City Clerk

SJB/jmp

**APPROVED:**

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "H. Dixon Flynn".  
H. Dixon Flynn -- City Manager

## Milestones at a Cornerstone

By Mike Law

Reprinted from Cycle News

Contrary to popular belief, the city of Lodi isn't famous just for the Credence Clearwater Revival rock and roll song with the classic line, "Stuck in Lodi again." Ask some long time residents and you may be surprised to learn that the sleepy Northern California town has another claim to fame: the Lodi Cycle Bowl. Incredibly enough, this race track has been operating continuously as a dirt track motorcycle racing facility since 1953. That's 50 years. If that isn't impressive enough, then also consider that the Lodi Motorcycle Club, which owns and operates the facility, just celebrated their 65th anniversary as a chartered AMA motorcycle club. In a day and age when dirt tracks seem to be vanishing like drive-in theatres, the Lodi Cycle Bowl has somehow continued to thrive, offering some of the best dirt track racing on the West Coast. Beginning in the first part of April each year, the track hosts a program of 20 to 30 race dates with both short track and TT events. When U. S. Highway 99 was built in 1947, the building department chose an area several miles east of Lodi to excavate for fill dirt. When this excavation had been completed, all that was left was a shell-shaped indentation in the ground. In 1953, that land was purchased by the Lodi Motorcycle Club. In exchange for a whopping \$2500, the club became the proud owners of what was known as a "burrow pit" and the property around it. The parcel came to a total of 12.5 acres. Over the years, lights and other comforts were added, and the track grew from a 1/10-mile dirt oval to a full-sized quarter mile and TT track. The original lights (which have long since been removed) were once mounted on windmill towers. But it is not so much just the race track itself that has brought the Lodi Cycle Bowl fame, but rather the generations of dirt track talent that it has produced. Over the past five decades, the Lodi Cycle Bowl has been a training ground of several AMA Grand National dirt track, AMA National, and World Championship number-one plate holders. Probably the most famous was a youngster from Modesto, California, who began racing and winning races at the Lodi Cycle Bowl on a regular basis. His name is Kenny Roberts, and his history is well chronicled. Roberts took the AMA Grand National Championship in 1973 and again in 1974 before moving on to three consecutive 500cc World Championship road racing crowns in 1978-80. Chris Carr, the 1992, 2001 and 2002 AMA Grand National Champion, and former member of the Harley-Davidson factory road racing team, considers Lodi as his "home track" and has been racing there for 24 years. Doug Chandler, a two-time AMA Superbike Champion and former 500cc GP rider for the now-defunct Team Cagiva, was one of Carr's main rivals at Lodi for years. Along with Roberts, Chandler has the distinction of being one of only four racers ever to complete a Grand Slam in the AMA Grand National Championship series-earning at least one victory in road racing, TT, short track, mile, and half-mile events. In addition to these champions, the track has served as a training ground for many other Grand National winners and contenders. Jim Rice raced at Lodi on a regular basis before earning a factory ride with B.S.A and winning 12 Grand

National events during his career. Doug Chandler and Alex Jorgensen also turned many a lap at Lodi. Ironically, both of these riders joined the elite club of winning a national event on all four types of dirt tracks. The late national number 91, Andy Tresser, also was a Lodi regular. The Cycle Bowl has also produced some famous brother acts, as well as father-and-son racers. Two generations of Bostroms have cut their teeth on Lodi dirt: specifically, Dave Bostrom in the late sixties, and more recently, sons Ben and Eric. All three carried national numbers. Chris Carr's dad Gerry, also campaigned the oval. Local hot shoe Toby Jorgensen not only follows the footsteps of his Uncle Alex, but also his equally fast father, Kim Jorgensen. Current national numbers Matt and Nate Wait are Cycle Bowl regulars dating back to the early eighties. Kurtis and Kenny Roberts, Jr., sons of King Kenny, have also honed their skill on the Lodi track. Road racers Wayne Rainey, Norifumi Abe, and Rich Oliver have occasionally practiced at Lodi. Many of these riders, regardless of generation, seem to have a common recollection of the facility: that it is an excellent place to learn. The lessons learned, however, are as diverse as the generations they span. Anyone who had watched "On Any Sunday" could appreciate Jim Rice's ability. Not only has he walked away from some pretty spectacular crashes, but he would almost always climb back on and race. This craft may have been learned at Lodi, but Rice also credits the Lodi Cycle Bowl as a place that helped him develop his reputation for smoothness. "I started racing at Lodi in 1965," Rice recalled. "Back then, you could race Lodi on Friday night, Hayward on Saturday, and Fremont on Sunday. It was grassroots racing at it's best. These tracks trained you for the pro level. That's what's lacking today. You can't race two to three times a week in Northern California anymore. I was black plate number one in 1967. Without Lodi, I might not have made it to the level I achieved. Lodi is one of those tracks where moisture in the air makes a difference. There were many times when this absolutely drove me nuts, But it was a good learning experience. The moisture in the air and track helped prepare me for tracks like Ascot." Like other racers, Rice had his heroes and rivals. "Ray Huff and Jorgy (Alex Jorgensen) were always tough competitors," Rice remembered. "The Anderson brothers, Lance and Bruce were tough too. Bruce was my rival. I had two idols: Dick Mann, of course, and Wally Weisler, my mentor. I met so many nice people at Lodi. I really mean it. The one event there that I will always remember was a 650cc Expert TT. I got too sideways coming out of the turn and went sideways over the jump. I did a big tank slapper, and since I was leading the race, everyone either ran over the bike or me. We had to carry that B.S.A off of the track. The guy who was running dead last was the only one who didn't go down. If the red flag hadn't come out, he would have won the race." Will there be a second generation of racers named Rice? "I have a son named Kyle," Rice said. "He's 5 years old right now. I'm going to let him pick his own path. I'm here for whatever he wants. Speaking as a father, I feel that what kids need today is a hobby or sport where they can start out young and continue into adulthood. Dirt track is one of those sports that offer you that. If he did choose racing, I'd like to teach him smoothness. Less sliding means more traction." When asked about his first race at Lodi, former AMA Grand National privateer Alex Jorgensen leaned on the counter at his family's motorcycle shop in Stockton, California. "I knew you were going to ask me something I couldn't

remember," Jorgensen said. "Let's see, my first race at Lodi was on a 100cc Kawasaki, and I was about 13 (around 1967). Local riders Paul Johnson and Jim Foley were the riders to beat on a regular basis. And of course when Rick Hocking and John Gennai came to town, I really had my work cut out for me. My fondest memory was when I put everything together at the final race of the season and won the 250cc and 650cc Expert races one year. I was also high point winner in those classes. I walked off with four trophies that were taller than me!" Jorgensen is also one of the elite few to win on all four types of dirt tracks, and he credits his Lodi experience. "I feel that racing at Lodi helped me to become a very versatile racer," Jorgensen said. "I was able to compete in several different classes ranging from 100-250cc. As I became more experienced, I graduated up to the bigger 650cc bikes. With both short track and TT events, I was able to keep my skill honed. Living near the track, I was fortunate to experiment with different brands, geometry's, etc." The Jorgensen kids were also at the track, often times with humorous results. "A few years ago my daughter decided to try racing a peewee at Lodi," Jorgensen said. "Unfortunately, we were more interested in teaching her about racing than the different flags. While leading the race, she got the white and checkered flags mixed up and pulled into the pits when she saw the white flag! But that's okay because she really spanked those boys!" Chris Carr, arguably Lodi's most famous son, has a memory like an elephant when it comes to his Lodi days. "That race track has taught me as much about life as it has racing," Carr explained while relaxing at the Cycle Bowl's clubhouse. "I was 6 years and 6 days when I had my first race at Lodi. I fell off. I didn't get hurt, but I did get mad. If I would have gotten up and finished, I would have gotten a trophy. Instead, I got a DNF. That was back in May of 1973, and I was in the peewee class. I will always will remember that race." Carr now offers the following friendly advice-based on the lessons he learned at Lodi-to his fellow riders. "If you fall down like I did, get up and finish the race if you can," Carr said. "You can never have too much time on the race track. Everybody crashes at one time or another. Everyone DNFs at some point. What you need is time and practice in your chosen profession. Not only will this make you a better racer, it'll also make you a better person." Carr has also promoted several races at Lodi over the years, and once again turned promoter in April of 1997. The event was billed as the Burger King/Applebee's Spring Classic Short track, and was a tremendous success, drawing nearly 1500 spectators-one of the largest crowds ever to fill the club grounds. "I wanted to give something back to the people," Carr said. "We presented a pros-only event on Saturday night. We ran a large peewee class at half-time to give the racers time to prepare for the main. Also, since we're big on the 100cc class at the track, we ran classes for the 100s. Needless to say, I was really excited about the race. All of the fans and racers have been good to me. This is my way of giving something back and saying 'thank you.'" And who were Carr's heroes at the Cycle Bowl? "The Jorgensen brothers," Carr said. "Alex for his style, and Kim for his speed." And Carr raised another point that seems pretty consistent within the history of the track. "I always liked the family atmosphere and tradition at the track," Carr said. "My dad raced here. My son is a year old now, but I would never push him into a sport, which has been a big part of my life. But if he wants to race, he's got my support, and he will probably start at Lodi." It seems as though rivalry between siblings and/or racing

families has been a benchmark at the Lodi Cycle Bowl since the early days, and it has continued in recent years as well. A good example of the young-hotshoe-turned-pro-road racer is Matt Wait. This veteran threw his leg over his first motorcycle at age three, on a 50cc peewee, then began racing at Lodi one year later. He also won this race. "I was black plate number one, two years in a row," Wait recalled. "The first year we sewed it up will always be a high point of my career." Wait went through the ranks of in the 80cc class from novice to expert, with the help of some serious competition and he is quick to name off his nemesis. "Ben Bostrom and the McDowell brothers and I had some serious dogfights on the track," Wait said. "We were competitors on the track, and buddies off the track. In the summer we would go swimming on Sunday, then hang out at each other's houses." While at Lodi, Wait became somewhat of a role model, helping and often giving advice to the younger riders like his brother and fellow professional dirt tracker and road racer Nathan "Gator" Wait. "I wanted to teach my younger brother everything I knew about racing," Wait said. "As I finished my last season in the 80cc class, Gator was just beginning. He was really tough. I guess that meant I was a good teacher." Ben Bostrom is another example of local dirt tracker-turned-pro. "I was 12 years old when I had my first race at Lodi," Bostrom said. "It was horrible! I was in the 80cc novice class, and I got dead last. I got real disappointed and went trail riding instead. I kind of liked that and tried motocross. The next year the Cycle Bowl built a cushion track on the infield. I liked this track, and went from novice to expert." As Bostrom and Wait served their apprenticeship at Lodi, a rivalry grew that, at least in intensity, was not at all unlike that of Kenny Roberts and Gary Scott in the early seventies. "We raced the whole season, and didn't miss any races," Bostrom said of his clashes with Wait. "Every race was wheel to wheel, elbow to elbow, and handlebar to handlebar. Late in the season I got a 250, crashed, and broke my leg. I gave away the title; Matt won it." The rivalry continued to rage. "Matt usually got the next bigger bike first," Bostrom said. "He got a 250, then I got one. We raced in the same classes, and we had lots of battles on the track. Matt and I were in our mid-teens when we got our 600cc bikes, and had our share of tight races. Looking back, it was a learning year. I think we were both fair starters, and the hole shot was everything on that track. Racing on the short track trained me for the Pro circuit. Lodi's TT trained me for tracks like Peoria and Castle Rock." As their heroes and predecessors before them, Wait and Bostrom will always be a part of the rich history of the Lodi Cycle Bowl. The race track has made many a racer, but clearly each one has added to the Lodi Legend in his own way. The future will likely continue to expand that legend, as more young talent of familiar heritage, like Toby Jorgensen, and those with less famous parentage-but no less ability and determination-such as Tony Meiring, continue to learn their trade in hope of one day joining the honor roll of motorcyclists who have graduated to the big time. Much has been said and written about how dirt track racing will survive in America. Most agree, however, that a grassroots program is a very important aspect of its regeneration. If a retrospective racing philosophy is a key to a racetrack's survival, then the Lodi Cycle Bowl should produce two things-more great racers, and another 50 years of great racing